

# THE PRODUCTION OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND SOME BARRIERS TO ACADEMICIZATION IN THE CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS

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## Abstract

The creative and performing arts have recently entered the university system in many European countries. They bring with them expectations of forms of practice and understandings that are non-traditional. These practices and understandings are manifestations of underlying values held by each community and, in our analysis, we see the difference in values as being the fundamental cause of the ensuing conflict. This article describes the development of a Profiling Culture model used by the authors to investigate this phenomenon. Following a usability trial, questionnaires were completed at TU Delft by 'aspiring members', 'full members' and 'gatekeepers' of the academicized community of professionals in Spatial Planning, in which they identified their 'heroes & icons', habits & behaviour, techniques & skills, language & rhetoric, and place & environment. The analyses of the data from the Profiling Culture model, using comparative analysis of culture as 'variable' and as 'root-metaphor', will yield initial outcomes that are based on a qualitative 'categorical' analysis. Ultimately, the findings will be expressed in terms of the different worldviews in operation in the academicized design field and the professional design field, in terms of a comparison between the academic worldviews and research models on the one hand, and the practitioners' worldviews and expectations on the other. The critical interpretation of the empirical data will enable both diagnosis (in which we will infer underlying values from observed practices) and prognosis (in which we will associate inferred values to significant practices) of the observed conflict.

## 1 PRELIMINARY COMMENT

At the University of Hertfordshire, UK, we have a cluster of projects called 'research into practice' (R2P), which consider the problems related to the emergence of something called 'practice-based research'. There are different names for it but, broadly speaking, what they have in common is that they all refer to what it is to undertake research in an area like painting or musical composition, architecture or design; namely creative and formally vocational areas. The academic model of knowledge in these areas has not been clearly articulated, meaning that often the values held in professional practice run counter to the academic models of knowledge being used and, as a result, there is a problem in accounting for research in areas of creative practice in ways that will be recognized and valued by both communities.

Within the R2P cluster, the 3-year AHRC-funded research project 'Non-traditional Knowledge and Communication' (NtKC) contributes to the ongoing debate about the best way of dealing with creative practice values that are, from the academic viewpoint, non-traditional. In connection to this project, we have previously described the development and delivery of a research methods training course in the Department of Spatial Planning and Design at TU Delft, NL [1]. The training course was developed, in turn, to cater to the department's Research by Design course, which attempts to respond both to the creative practice and the academic community by including a practical and theoretical component in its curriculum. The analysis found issues with curriculum-building in an area of epistemological uncertainty which also presented difficulties in finding assessment criteria that both communities could agree upon. The findings were discussed theoretically in terms of community cultures and values, and how the TU Delft case typically manifests the differences between the worldviews of academic research and professional practice, with their differing aims and values.

In that first phase of the NtKC study we found challenges to curriculum development in the gap analysis, the curriculum design and assessment and, furthermore, identified the existence of two

distinct communities that held two distinct worldviews. In the second phase we are currently exploring the worldviews of the creative practice community as evidenced by the key academic figures at TU Delft and comparing that to the control group represented by the sample of new students who have not yet been enculturated with the TU Delft/Spatial Planning worldview. The present paper describes the second phase, more specifically the theoretical framework that has guided the design of the empirical investigations that are being conducted into the worldview of the design community in the academic context. We describe how the theoretical framework from the first phase has been extended to include contributions from cultural theory and ethnography.

## **2 CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Issues arising from the academicization of cultures of creative practice**

The first phase of the NtKC project has generated a substantial number of outputs. The team position on academic research in areas of creative practice is epitomized by the ontology that is presented in the article: 'Eight Criteria for Practice-based Research in the Creative and Cultural Industries' [2]. In that article, the authors took a logical position and proposed an ontology of academic research which was composed of four 'necessary and sufficient conditions'. These four criteria are: the possession of a question and an answer, the presence of something corresponding to the term 'knowledge', a method that connected the answers in a meaningful way to the questions that were asked, and an audience for whom all this would have significance. The advantage of taking an ontological approach is that it seems to offer a disinterested description of the criteria by which something may function, and therefore to establish the criteria by which something may be judged as 'being that thing'. Conversely, the ontological approach suffers from the disadvantage that there may be no actual cases that meet the conditions found through the logical construction and, thereby, an empty category would have been created. Theories arising from actual cases, from an epistemological approach such as the 'case study method' [3] or 'grounded theory' [4], are attempts to avoid this disadvantage.

As a consequence of first taking an ontological position and thinking, 'it *must* be thus', we then took an epistemological position and looked at how things *actually were*, identifying four further issues that characterised the epistemology of practice. These four issues were described as: the role of text and image, the relationship of form and content, the function of rhetoric and the manifestation of experience – each of which presented issues for the actual production of academic research as a consequence of the ontological conditions described by our first four criteria. The advantage of taking an epistemological position is that it seems to offer a situated description of what can be found in the field, and the criteria satisfied by instances that are in operation. Conversely, the epistemological position may suffer from circularity since it attempts to define the very cases that it selects resulting in an iterative cycle of cause and consequence.

The presence of issues, and in many cases conflicts, in the production of academic research in areas of creative practice indicated to us the existence of dualities in the academic context that were being faced by the actors themselves. This drew our attention to the social organization of the field and the presence of two distinct sub-cultures: that of the academics and that of the creative practitioners. We noted that each sub-culture arose out of a distinct historical and social background in which its characterizing values were coherent within the sub-culture but quite different when compared with the other. The challenge, so far as understanding the academicization of the creative arts was concerned, was to determine whether these sub-cultures represented irreconcilable worldviews or whether their differences were superficial and that some kind of homogenization was possible [5]. In cultural terms, it was important to understand what characterised each community, as distinct from or similar to the other. For this reason, in the second phase of the NtKC project, we turn to the actors themselves and observe how they are enculturated and socialized to the areas of creative practice, and therefore what is the source of their values and how are these reproduced by the community.

### **2.2 Manifestations of community culture**

The identification of a culture assumes the existence of likeness and similarity within the culture, and the difference between one group and another that is culturally given and sufficient to differentiate one group from the other. As a result, some authors hold that for the definition of a culture, similarity and universality are of primary importance [6], whilst others focus more on the documentation of distinction [7]. The underlying structure of culture is largely intangible and difficult to model in a precise way. Studies of culture rely in the first place on some sort of expression of intangible shared values in order

to begin reading and deciphering them. Following Schein [8], Hofstede [9] and Trice and Beyer [10], Schjervén proposed that observed artefacts and creations, visible and audible behaviour patterns along with symbols, heroes, and rituals; provide forms of practices through which meanings are expressed, affirmed and communicated to members [11].

Work in general, and professions in particular, can be a source for establishing the core elements of culture; its shared values, beliefs and assumptions. These cultural forms convey ideological meanings that are learned by members of an occupation and distinguish one occupation from another through specific myths, stories, symbols, language and argot, rituals and taboos, rites and ceremonies. According to Trice, the general distinction between one profession and another is based on 'a systematic body of knowledge learned [in educational settings] and known only to members of the occupation' [12]. Likewise, Rothstein argues that certain attitudes, values, and behaviour can be attributed to differences in the educational culture of the respective disciplines. Based on a study of business and design students integrated in a course, Rothstein found clear differences between the two groups, and argues that it is education that shapes the respective students differences. 'Such distinctions suggest that students entered the course with certain attitudes, values, and behaviour that can be attributed to differences in the educational culture of their respective disciplines' [13]. A profession can be defined as a group of people who claim the right to perform a distinctive set of tasks through the possession of a relatively distinct and unique knowledge base and these groups formally exist when there is a consensus that certain individuals are expected to perform these tasks and to exercise degrees of control over how they are done [12].

Returning to the conceptual language of our ontological position, different worldviews can be identified as linked to the core of practices and associated ways of thinking and evaluating the results of discipline-specific production. This situation links professional training to professional epistemology – there are tangible manifestations of the intangible core of a culture. Language, broadly conceived, transmits values, beliefs and assumptions and, in turn, determines how things are perceived, thought and talked about. Therefore tangible manifestations work as tools for communication and expression and also as methodological tools for interpreting and analysing the phenomenon of culture. Tangible manifestations begin to influence behaviour, which means that professional language and practice are intimately related and reinforce one another in the unfolding of a particular work process. Through discourse analysis and observation of behaviour, an understanding can be gained of the intangible shared values of a professional community.

### **2.3 Dualities between academic enculturation and professional practice culture**

Dana Cuff's book on the production of the architect through the enculturation process of education and practice, relies on an ethnographic observation of the dualities between the 'espoused theory', which represents the idealized values of the architect, and 'theory-in-use' which guides their practical actions [14]. Her study focuses on various social and economic aspects of the architectural profession and highlights that education and training are the main vehicles for the enculturation of the idealized values of the creative professional.

Through a consideration of the dichotomies that arise between the idealized image of the lone architect genius and the reality of the architect practitioner, she identifies certain 'disseminators of the professional ethos' which are focussed particularly on their education [14]. She expresses the central dichotomies in this idealized versus real architect relationship as that between the individual and the collective; between the autonomous artist and the teams of professionals that are needed to actually realise the architectural vision. Thus she identifies a tension between the self-image that architects have of being a creative and visionary individual, and the practical reality that is equally well-known to the architect of being part of a team possessing knowledge and skills. The presence of these opposed views of 'the architect' is important for Cuff in her explanation of the persistence of idealized values even in the face of the experience of professional practice that defies those values.

We claim that architecture is not alone in maintaining these idealized values that actually conflict with professional performance indicators. We claim that such a conflict is common in the creative arts as a whole, and corresponds to the continued indeterminacy in terms of identifying objective measures of performance [14, 15]. Furthermore, there is a desire for maintaining the indeterminate qualities afforded by the idealized professional because it serves to maintain the culture as distinct. Thus the creative practitioner maintains authority, and therefore identity and difference, by resisting the determination of criteria. We observed this when we found additional four issues arising from our

epistemology of practice that were not identified when we looked at it purely ontologically. Our ontology represents an attempt to make all factors determinate, but in the hands of the practitioners in the field, some of that determinacy was challenged and ultimately converted back into indeterminacy.

Within the sociological framework adopted by Cuff, the role of education is central to the process of construction of the professional because it focuses on gaining membership rather than gaining skills – a notion that ultimately suggests the position that values are more important than practical knowledge in the identification of membership. This seemed to us to be central to our concern in the second phase of the project, which we expressed as the relationship between the aspiring member and the gatekeeper of the professional culture: What is the relationship between the external perception of the profession and the internal rationale of that profession as shown by values and actions? This required us to understand what would indicate the values held by each group and how these could be mobilised in order to identify the profile of the various actors and therefore any potential points of tension between them.

### **3 PROFILING COMMUNITY CULTURES**

#### **3.1 The Model**

As a result of the theoretical framework and structuring concepts outlined above, we developed a model for profiling community cultures by inferring their internal values from observation of their behavioural patterns and value statements (Fig. 1). The model reflects the visible and invisible domains of culture, and gives prominence to the interface between these – that is, a distinct interface identified as ‘statements’ which transport the invisible ‘values,’ ‘beliefs,’ etc. into the domain of visible facts. This means that an expressed form for each culture involved, would have to be traced back and analysed with respect to its origin. Cultural forms of expression allow for registering, mapping and investigating cultural phenomena. This is significant not only because cultural forms of expression illustrate underlying and otherwise inaccessible variables or elements that make up a culture, but also because they reflect back on the cultural phenomenon(a) and give indications to the nature of the culture(s) in question.

Practices are an integral part of a cultural phenomenon and identity, are specific to a profession and cut through all levels in the hierarchically structured models of culture. Therefore the Profiling Culture model emphasises the role of practices and expands the level where occupational differentiation takes place, i.e. a level that is specific to a group and is learned. Occupational culture inscribes a complex set of hierarchically structured variables, traditions, individuals and professional sub-groups. Professional practices are already culturally coded through professional education and training and accompanied and sustained by professionally specific forms of thinking and language.

Less visible	Forms or practice whereby the meanings are expressed, affirmed and communicated; also rites and ceremonies	More visible
Preconscious		More conscious
Substance or the networks of meaning contained in its ideologies, norms and values		
Underlying assumptions	Forms of expression in values and rituals	
Personal and internal	Consensual and externalized	
Indirect	More easily detectable	
Fundamental	Functional	
Constitutive aspects	Articulated	
Values: congruent with underlying assumptions OR rationalizations/aspirations for the future	Artefacts and creations: technology, art, visible and audible behaviour patterns and testable values; observed manifestations: visible but often not decipherable; human practices: symbols, heroes and rituals	



Fig. 1: Profiling Culture model

## 3.2 Experiment design

The Profiling Culture model is being applied at TU Delft where we are proposing an empirical investigation to examine the role of culture and the process of enculturation in urban planning education. The investigation uses surveys and interviews with novice students, enculturated students and staff. The design of the questionnaire that structures the online survey and guides the interviews followed the Profiling Culture model and asked about the categories of visible manifestation of values, namely about: heroes and icons, habits and behaviour, techniques and skills, language and rhetoric, and place and environment.

The content of the questionnaire and the experiment design first underwent a usability trial in order to test online interface, clarity of question phrasing and survey feasibility. The aim of this trial was to test aspects of the online survey that related to the use and operation of the interface as well as the procedure for administering the test [16]. Usability tests on interactive multimedia typically consider the look, use and information made available to the user. From the literature [17], the protocol for testing the usability of a website calls for the observation of five participants while they navigate through the site. The usability trial on the online survey was therefore administered individually to five members of the international research project at the University of Mackenzie, São Paulo, Brazil [18]. These included senior researchers, lecturers, undergraduate and postgraduate students. The findings from the usability trial contributed to the improvement of data archiving and processing, enabled us to compile binary terminology on each one of the five themes, and enabled us to verify the relevance of data towards our aim of profiling community cultures and the process of enculturation.

In order to verify the process of enculturation through higher education, we chose three samples from the TU Delft community: new students (Aspiring Members), continuing students (Full Members) and staff (Gatekeepers). The online survey was applied to the Aspiring and Full Members groups and the Gatekeepers were interviewed. Despite these two different modes of delivery of the questionnaire, i.e. survey and interview, the content of the questionnaire was the same. We registered independent variables, i.e. age, gender, nationality, level of education, and also some more 'subjective' variables that we felt indicated the participant's understanding of their field, i.e. area of training/specialization, area of expertise/professional practice and occupation. The questionnaire then explicitly explored the participant's understanding of their professional field and practice through open-ended questions that asked about the five themes:

**Heroes & Icons:** Please list seminal and/or key figures (i.e. architects; urban planners; designers; fine and performing artists; engineers; musicians; etc.) that epitomize and/or best represent your professional field.

**Habits & Behaviour:** Please list customary actions and/or activities (i.e. viewing the work of other professionals; reading professional material; smoking; drinking; socializing; talking; attending events, seminars and/or courses; etc.) that you undertake or that you have observed in colleagues that epitomize and best represent your professional field.

**Techniques & Skills:** Please list techniques and/or skills (i.e. drawing, writing, reading, modelling; external experience such as visits to sites and events; introspective inspiration from references, personal histories, literature, imagery, etc.) that you use as part of your professional activity or with which you identify yourself as a professional.

**Language & Rhetoric:** Please list terminology, expressions and/or jargon (i.e. 'design'; 'project'; 'aesthetic'; 'it works' as in a good but indescribable quality of a design solution; 'to research'; etc.) that epitomize and best represent your professional field; has a profession-specific meaning or nuance to it; is unique to your field; is often misunderstood; etc.

**Place & Environment:** Please list descriptors (i.e. formal, office, studio, personal, isolated, collaborative, open, etc.) that you associate with your place of work and/or that help to define the profession and professional activity that is undertaken in that space.

## 3.3 Means of analysis

The relationship between the invisible and visible manifestations of culture from the empirical data collected through surveying and interviewing as described above will be analysed through a comparative analysis of culture as 'variable' and as 'root-metaphor'.

The variable approach considers culture within a functionalist tradition. It is a top-down approach, which helps to objectify community cultures and make the analysis of these more manageable. It sees

culture as a variable, either independent or dependent, and reflects the view that culture can contribute to imperatives for behaviour.

The root-metaphor approach sees a culture as a particular form of human expression, which encapsulates underlying processes in the human mind. It offers a softer and more nuanced view in which the participation and expression of each member in the group engenders its culture. Cultures are understood through a systemic bottom-up approach based on the respective, particular paradigms. It is helpful to consider culture in relation to their association to metaphors because metaphors derive from fundamental assumptions about human nature and provide explanations to various problems.

There are three root-metaphor approaches, each of which attempts to identify the expression of culture. The main similarity between them is that they each access the question of culture through the human subject, not the over-arching construct of the community. The difference between them is how they approach the human subject. In the first root-metaphor, a cognitive anthropological perspective applied to the study of community culture enables the consideration of how community rules or patterns of shared knowledge shape behaviour and certain worldviews. In the second root-metaphor, culture, understood as a system of shared symbols and meaning, represents the symbolic perspective. The analysis aims to interpret or decipher the pattern of symbolic discourse, that is, to 'show the ways symbols are linked in meaningful relationships and demonstrate how they are related to the activities of the people in a setting' [19]. In the third root-metaphor, when culture is understood as the expression of unconscious psychological processes, it belongs to the structural and psychodynamic perspective. The aim of the analysis is to uncover the hidden dimensions of the human mind. This perspective suggests that there exists a deep underlying structure, a structure consisting of values and assumptions, which must be tapped into in order to understand behaviour.

The analyses of the data from the Profiling Culture model using comparative analysis of culture as 'variable' and as 'root-metaphor' will enable initial outcomes that are based on a qualitative 'categorical' analysis of the results. The findings will be expressed in terms of the different worldviews in operation in the academicized design field and the professional design field, in terms of a comparison between the academic worldviews and research models and the practitioners' worldviews and expectations. The critical interpretation of the empirical data will enable both diagnosis (in which we will infer underlying values from observed practices) and prognosis (in which we will associate inferred values to significant practices).

## 4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK).

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